

# “Who Do You Really Love?”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – October 31, 2021

Mark 12:28-34

I found a new version of 1 Corinthians 13 - church version.

“If our church could hold services in five languages or our members could speak three, but we didn’t **love others**, we would be all talk and no action.

If our church really expressed its spiritual gifts with wholehearted service and we became spiritual giants, but we did not **love others**, what good would we be?

If our church had such faith that resulted in great healings and great miracles taking place, but we really did not **love others**, what would be the point? If we gave 50% of our budget to various missions across our nation and around our world so that a great deal of spiritual and physical poverty was alleviated, but we did not **love others**, why would we do it?

Our church is patient and kind. Our church is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Our church does not demand its own way. Our church is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. Our church is never glad about injustice but rejoices when the truth wins out. Our church never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

God and His **love** will last forever. But our church’s pronouncements and decisions and giftedness and abilities will all disappear. Our church now knows only a little but when the Lord returns, our church will know everything.

It’s like this, “When we were still new believers, our church spoke and thought and reasoned like a new believer. But as we grew up, we

became mature believers. Today, we don't see things clearly or fully understand everything that has happened to us. All that our church knows at this point in time is partial and incomplete, but one day our church, and all of those redeemed by God, will know everything that God knows!"

There are three things that will endure beyond our church - faith, hope, and **love** - and the greatest of these is **love**."

*(Based on NLT of I Corinthians 13) Jim Kane*

For the last seven weeks we have talked about the church. What is the purpose and what do we get out of church? We find that we get out what we put into it. If we put in our time, our talents, and our treasures, then we get so much back in return. The return is more than what we could ever expect. The joy we receive is almost unbelievable. And yes, we get back in proportion to what we put into this place.

But the question we come back to often is why? Why do we give? Why do we do what we do? And the answer, as simple as it sounds, is also profound. **LOVE**. Not the **love** you hear in **love** songs on the radio, but real **love** that is expressed by God for us. God so **loved** us, that God gave us everything. God saved us. God values us. God finds us irresistible.

Has anyone in your life found you irresistible before? And I am sure you have, but it will never be the caliber that God's **love** provides. That type of **love** is not given by God's creation. Only for the fact that we just can't understand why God **loves** us so much.

Our **love** tends to focus on some people. We find them attractive, interesting, or captivating. We generally don't want to be alone. We need to **love** and to be **loved**.

People will do crazy things all in the name of **love**. There was once a farmer that plowed and planted his field so that as the plants grew, it

would say “Marry Me” from the air. As the time came to propose to his **love**, he chartered a plane to take her over the field so that he could propose. But little did he know that his **love** was afraid of heights. She refused to get on the plane. He had to all but pick her up and throw her on the plane. And when the big time came to fly over the field, she was so mad at him. Then they hit a small air pocket and jerked the plane around. And if that wasn’t bad enough, her lunch decided to make a reappearance which was quite unexpected, and she spent the time flying over the field throwing up in a bag and missed his proposal. Now the farmer was quite upset by all of this and when they landed, he could hardly speak. His **love** didn’t understand what all of this was about until she saw the sign when they reach the airport saying, “Congratulations on saying yes!”

Do we do crazy things in the name of love? I would have to say yes.

**Love** is so complete. It is all encompassing. As scripture has put it, “JESUS ANSWERED, ‘THE FIRST IS, HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE; <sup>30</sup> YOU SHALL **LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD** WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ <sup>31</sup> THE SECOND IS THIS, ‘YOU SHALL **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**’ THERE IS NO OTHER COMMANDMENT GREATER THAN THESE.” Can you honestly say that we have the ability and capacity to **love** like God **loves** us?

The good news is that we don’t have to. Yes, we are to **love** God with all that we are. That is hard to even begin to do. But God does not expect us to **love** with the intensity that He **loves** us. God expects us to move to this level as we learn to **love** our neighbors. As *Matthew 25* also says, “when you **love** the least of these, you did it to me.” We learn to **love God** by learning to **love each other**.

When we treat each other respectfully; when we help our neighbor not expecting anything in return, when we go over and beyond what others are asking or expecting, we are demonstrating **love**. When we

fill out our pledge/commitment card, or take a name off the tree at Christmas time and buy a gift, or take the time to write a note to a widow saying that we are thinking of her is showing love.

Church teaches us that this world is bigger than our little world that revolves around us. It teaches us that our stewardship reacts to the challenges that this world gives to us so that we have new and expanding **opportunities to love neighbor** and to **love God**. We are constantly **challenged** by God because when we overcome the **challenges** in life, then and only then, do we see the **opportunities** that God is giving to us. We are moved to think beyond ourselves and what we can get . . . to thinking how we can help and what can we give.

That is **love**. That is what we do here. When we take communion, the sacrifice given for you to drink that sip of juice or eat that piece of bread is **love** incarnate. The church is the training ground to learn to **love** more and to **love** better. If you aren't inspired to express your **love** somehow after you leave this place, either I have failed to teach you, or you have failed to pay attention . . . because it is all about **love**.

By now many of you have received your pledge/commitment cards. You have looked over your finances and have tried to figure out what you plan to give next year. Some of you are giving for the very first time, hopefully inspired by something that I have said. But no matter what you give and how you give, your ultimate inspiration is **love**. It is a reflection of how much God **loves** you and your **love** for your neighbor. I encourage you to pray about your giving. And reflect on the **love** that God has given to you. Allow that to direct your giving for next year's ministry. Stewardship is about overcoming our **challenges**, receiving **opportunities** and reflecting God's **love**. Amen.